



2025 History Essay Contest

School 5th Grade Winner

Juan Diego's Tilma

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Did you know that God uses the smallest people to do the greatest things? In chapter five of St. Mathew's gospel, Jesus teaches a beautiful Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." In the mid 16th century, a poor Aztec man proved this truth. This man's name is Juan Diego. However, this wasn't always his name. Before the Spanish came to North America his name was Cuauhtlatoatzin. This name means "The Talking Eagle" or "One who speaks like an Eagle". When he became a Christian, he took the name Juan Diego, which means "God is gracious." Of course, no one could have possibly imagined that the change of his name through his Christian conversion would change the course of history.

Juan Diego was born in a region of Mexico in 1474. He was raised among pagans in an Aztec culture. In the Aztec culture, they would sacrifice human beings to their false gods. They sacrificed human beings to the "gods" believing that something bad would happen to them if they didn't. This all took place in the 16th century in North America.

Soon after, The Spanish came to North America and conquered the Aztecs. The Spanish weren't always perfect examples of Christianity, but they brought missionaries who preached the gospel. When Juan Diego was older, he converted to Catholicism and was baptized.

One day when he was walking home from Mass, he heard a beautiful sound and followed it to Tepeyac Hill. He was so surprised because when the music stopped he saw the most beautiful lady. She introduced herself as The Virgin Mary, Mother of God. The Virgin Mary told him to ask the bishop to build a church on that same hill in her honor.

Juan Diego immediately went to the bishop with Our Lady's request, but the bishop didn't believe him. Juan Diego pleaded before the bishop two more times until the bishop finally asked for a sign from Our Lady to fulfill her request. Unfortunately, when he was going to get the sign from Our Lady his uncle became very ill. Juan Diego went to get a priest instead of meeting Our Lady because he thought his uncle was going to die. Our Lady surprised him while on his way to get a priest. Seeing the distressed look on his face, she promised him that his uncle was already healed. She also told him he would find the sign at the top of Tepeyac Hill. When he got there he found an abundance of roses. He was surprised to see them because roses never grew in winter. He filled his tilma with the roses as a sign for the bishop. When Juan Diego showed the bishop the roses everyone present in the room knelt down in awe. Juan Diego looked down on his tilma and realized an image of Our Lady was on it. This image was forever known as Our Lady of Guadalupe. The bishop finally believed Juan Diego and built the church Our Lady of Guadalupe had requested.

After this encounter, over nine million Aztecs were baptized and changed their way of living. If it weren't for Juan Diego's encounter with Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Aztecs would have continued to sacrifice human beings to their false gods. Juan Diego wasn't a king, he didn't have any gold or riches, but God still chose him for his crucial mission. Juan Diego proved that with God's grace and great faith, one can truly do amazing things. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

Bibliography

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